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Do We Still Need Our 'Clandestine Warriors'?

The fight between the Central Intelligence Agency and a former employee named Victor Marchetti is a lot more important than it sounds.

On the surface we have another boring argument about secrecy. Marchetti writes a book about CIA. The agency says the book contains classified material. It goes to court asking for an order not to publish. The judge rules that some of the material may be published (CIA forgot to classify it) and some may not.

So Marchetti's book will be published with 168 deletions, and his publisher (Knopf) will appeal the judge's ruling at great financial cost.

Pending appeal, all of the foregoing is likely to encourage the heavier use of rubber stamps market "secret" by CIA people, some of whom don't know a secret from a paper clip, and also to obscure Marchetti's point in writing the book.

Here, in the interests of objectivity, a word should be said about Marchetti's errors of judgment. What possible good can it do to name foreign polit-

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icians who, back in the late '40s, when the cold war was really hot, took money from the CIA to build their political organizations? Some of them have now attained power. Naming them may ruin them. Is the public titillation worth the ruin? There are other such judgmental faults. They detract from Marchetti's main point.

Nevertheless, the main point is worth making. It is that the clandestine operations side of the agency—particularly those which are paramilitary in nature—ought to be disbanded. I am not talking about secret intelligence. I am talking about running secret wars in Laos and Cuba and overthrowing governments in South America and elsewhere. I am talking about

buying labor unions and conducting propaganda operations.

If the CIA ever had a mandate for this kind of thing, it has long since been revoked. "I had the greatest forebodings about this organization and warned the President (Truman) that, as set up, neither he, the National Security Council nor anyone else would be in a position to know what it was doing or to control it," wrote Dean Acheson. The advice not taken seems prophetic.

Look back, if you will, at Laos; at the Bay of Pigs; at some of the sanguinary operations in Vietnam. Did they not do far more harm than good? Were they not either foisted upon partially willing Presidents by zealous agency

salesmen or invented on the spot simply because the capability to conduct them had been authorized?

And the propaganda. There was a time when front groups battled front groups in ideological struggle, and public opinion could be swayed. CIA went on employing propaganda fronts long after anybody except professionals on both sides was paying any attention to the propaganda. It is still doing so. The usefulness is marginal; the chances for embarrassment great.

CIA's power in the Washington power game has diminished substantially during the Nixon years. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has a firm hand on operations, and William Colby, CIA's new director, reports to Kissinger and not to the President, as his predecessors always did.

But administrators change: CIA's clandestine operations division goes right on planning. If Henry Kissinger can take time out from present crises to oversee its dismantlement, he will prevent some future ones.